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ABSTRACT

Desegregation and integration are affected by many of the same forces that affect other major social changes, such as dramatic news events, authority in the form of law and policy, educational programs, and experience of the new situation. How these forces affect desegregation and integration has to do with peoples' attitudes and the effect of changed attitudes on changed behavior. This paper concerns the major forces affecting desegregation and integration as presented in three different studies that have dealt with patterns in processes of desegregation and integration. Each study determined whose attitudes and behavior were the major target of change efforts, what positions they held, and whether they were black and white, or primarily white. It is noted that for integration as well as desegregation, the major focus for change is white resistance to the process. The major forces affecting desegregation and integration are: (1) the occurrence of dramatic national events, (2) law or administrative edicts or authority, (3) teacher attitudes toward race, (4) interracial contact, and (4) the presence of certain educational programs (i.e. compensatory efforts to equalize educational opportunities and curriculum and materials reflective of cultural diversity). It is concluded that desegregation demands less than integration. Law, administrative policy, and teacher attitudes can take the process only so far. Integration must ultimately come from the minds and heart of the people. These reports suggest that a combined approach is called for: starting young, and providing supports for attitude change. (Author/AM)

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Factors in Desegregation and Integration

Susan R. Nevas (1977)

Desegregation and integration are affected by many of the same forces that affect other major social changes, such as dramatic news events, authority in the form of law and policy, educational programs, and experience of the new situation. How these forces affect desegregation and integration has to do with people's attitudes and the effect of changed attitudes on changed behavior.

Among social psychologists the relationship of attitudes to behavior is controversial. Some would maintain that attitudes do not predict behavior, but most would agree that there is a link between the two. It is this author's position that attitudes must begin to change—but that they need not change in their entirety—in order to permit new behavior to emerge.

In reviewing the dynamics of social change it is important to realize that attitudes exist both publicly and privately. The personal feelings and beliefs of an individual are not necessarily the same as the corresponding feelings and beliefs in society at large, or in some segment of it. However, the public attitudes greatly affect the private sphere, shaping it at the outset and all along the way. They also legitimize the expression of private ideas. While an individual may arrive at his or her own beliefs and feelings out of direct private experience rather than hearsay, he or she will need a lot of courage to voice such convictions if they are far out of sink with prevailing attitudes. By prevailing attitudes we do not mean those of an aggregated mass, but rather of the reference groups for a particular individual—those people to whom he or she must answer and with whom he or she must live.

In this paper we will refer to three recent studies that have to do with patterns in processes of desegregation and integration: Edmund Gordon's 1976 study of desegregation and integration in six communities; the 1976 study by G.M. Forehand, M. Ragosta, and D.A. Rock of integration in 94 elementary schools and 68 high schools; and T.F. Pettigrew's 1970 study of racial attitudes and desegregation in Texas and in three northern communities. What concerns us are the major forces affecting desegregation and integration as presented in these studies.

Basis for Comparisons

In the case of each of the three studies, it was important to determine first whose attitudes and behaviors were the major target of change efforts, what positions they held, and whether they were black and white, or primarily white.

Desegregation, as defined by Gordon in his study, entails "the physical mixing of the races without regard to the relative statuses of the two groups." Integration means "the interaction of the races based on mutual respect and equal status among them." The principal actors who directly implement these two outcomes are different. Desegregation, in the first instance, is the work of administrative decision-makers: superintendents, school boards, principals. Secondarily, in the implementation stage, peaceful desegregation depends on acceptance by teachers, parents, and community. Integration, while reflected in interactions among all members of the school family, including administrators, teachers, and parents, is ultimately realized when the targets of the effort, the children, interact positively. As in the Forehand et al. study, we will treat students as the principal actors in integration and will look at other people mainly for their impact on the children.

To return to the question of whether we are looking at black or white behavior and attitudes, in the case of desegregation, administrative decision-makers are primarily white; and, as Pettigrew puts it, the opinion climate is also largely white. While both black and white staffs and communities must accept desegregation, the consensus is that the major resistance comes from the whites.

In integration, both black and white children must be willing to interact on an equal and mutually respectful footing.

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But again, the consensus is that the principal obstacles to equality and respect rest in the minds and behavior of the whites; black attitudes are to a large extent a result of past expectations about such white attitudes and current experience with them. Thus, for integration as well as desegregation, the major focus for change is white resistance to the process.

The Major Forces

I. Dramatic Events

Pettigrew reported a great change in the attitudes of white Texans toward desegregation between 1954 and 1961. In general white resistance to desegregation decreased by about one-third, the decrease being greatest among high-status Republicans. In contrast, the resistance of low-status east Texans actually increased. Dramatic national events played a role in this change of attitude. The overall decline in resistance was particularly sharp after the federal troops enforced court orders in Little Rock in 1957. Desegregation also gained more acceptance among whites after the assassination of Martin Luther King. The Gordon report implies a similar phenomenon in Birmingham. One year after the church bombing in 1962 in which four little black girls were killed, the city adopted a voluntary desegregation plan. By 1967 Birmingham had its first Republican mayor and by 1971, its first black city council member. Gradually, a moderate-liberal coalition took over; according to the report, the change grew out of reaction to the violence of the late fifties and early sixties.

Pettigrew argues that black reactions to the assassinations followed the same principle as white reactions; the events intensified existing sentiment. Those who were already inclined to favor desegregation—the younger and more militant blacks, and black parents whose children were already involved in the process, along with higher-status whites—were confirmed in their leanings. Older, lower-class, and more intimidated blacks, along with lower-class and more militant whites, showed a similar increase in their existing resistance to desegregation.

Aside from the general tendency of dramatic events to promote consistency with past attitudes, it may be that the effect of the events works by presenting powerful images that evoke identification. Or perhaps, it is the reaction to identification that is crucial. After Little Rock, for example, a southern white might have found it hard to participate in segregation without associating himself with the abusive mobs he saw on TV. Attitudes about acceptable behavior in spheres other than race can intervene to modify an individual's stance toward support of desegregation. For a higher-status white, the Little Rock mobs might have been a repugnant association, while for lower-class whites, with fewer scruples about violence and more virulent attitudes toward racial contact, the effect might have been just the opposite.

For blacks, too, reactions to identification might be the key elements in the effect on desegregation attitudes. Younger, more activist blacks, in identifying with the black children and parents of Little Rock, might be inspired by their courage, and feel that to be less brave would be to let down these pioneers. They might also feel encouraged by the success of the Little Rock blacks and the powerful national legitimization of their effort by federal troop support. More timid members of the black community, in identifying with those same Little Rock people, might fear the status of victim rather than identify with the heroes.

II. Authority: Law and Policy

Another force that can move people to confirm or reexamine the way they interpret their behavior is authority. Black people might find in the dispatch of federal troops to Little Rock a dramatic, official legitimation of their cause. But by the same token, Pettigrew reported, whites could find in Congressional arguments against civil rights legislation, legitimation for resistance. While the latter event had to do with the making of new law rather than the enforcement of established law, it still presented the nation with the image of elected lawmakers opposing desegregation.

Law and administrative policy, once established, both do more than affect images of legitimacy. They define the limits of formally permitted behavior. Law and administrative edict thus "up the ante" for defense of certain positions, by attaching sanctions. One can no longer engage in the prohibited behavior with impunity. It is no longer a choice in the same sense, a matter of private conscience or preference. Thus, law or administrative edict, like dramatic events, can alter an individual's attitude—his or her ideas about what is acceptable to do. Again, they may alter a segregationist's notions not so much by changing his or her opinion about appropriate behavior toward blacks, but by bringing notions about appropriate behavior in other areas into conflict with ideas about interracial behavior. If a person believes that it is important to be a law-abiding citizen and that defiance of the law is an extreme act, the maintenance of self-image may depend on giving those values priority over interracial values. Continued tenure in a position of professional responsibility may also come to depend on subordinating racial attitudes. Law, in short, may also bring values about economic and professional self-interest into conflict with racial values.

These principles may explain why, according to Pettigrew, law was particularly crucial in achieving desegregation in those Texas counties where white public opinion was most united against it. The law probably did not overcome or change the racial attitudes; it simply made acceptance of desegregation necessary despite those attitudes. The law seems to have had a twofold effect: forcing those responsible for the drafting of desegregation plans to write acceptable plans or lose their positions and permitting public opinion to tolerate this official behavior, however reluctantly.

The parallel phenomenon is the crucial role of clear policy from boards of education, superintendents, and principals in achieving peaceful acceptance of desegregation. At times clear administrative policy also fostered structural integration, or equalization of statuses and opportunities within the mixed setting. Gordon's team of researchers found such factors particularly crucial in Ewing, New Jersey, and Orangeburg, South Carolina.

Forehand et al. stressed that for white children in both the elementary and high school segments of his study, principals' attitudes seemed to be a major antecedent condition for the all-important teacher attitudes. While teachers were

also heavily influenced by disparities between black and white socioeconomic status, and in the lower grades, by achievement differences as well, firm administrative policies seemed important. Accordingly, *A Handbook for Integrated Schooling*, by Forehand et al., asserted that salience of integration as a goal was crucial to effective integration. This meant, in part, that unbiased behavior was demanded of the staff, whether or not they believed in it. It also meant that the staff displayed the intention to act positively, whether out of professional duty or ideology.

III. Teacher Attitudes

Forehand et al. emphasized teacher attitudes toward race as the crucial determinant of white student attitudes at both the elementary and high school levels. Accordingly, they stressed the role of modeling behavior by teachers as important for student attitudes. In other words, before students could be expected to display unbiased behavior and interests in interracial friendships, teachers would have to set an example. In the Gordon study, these principles were implicit. Structural integration, based on equity, status equalization, and interracial contact throughout all levels of the school, seems to have been considered an antecedent to cultural integration, or interracial respect and understanding. More directly, the report noted that in Ewing, Durham, and Birmingham, lack of after-school interaction among students of different races correlated with the phenomenon among teachers. In Birmingham, the same pattern applied during school; one school even had segregated teacher lounges.

The Forehand et al. study hypothesized that the lesser impact of teacher attitudes on black student attitudes was related, first of all, to the fact that black racial attitudes are largely shaped by other blacks. If he meant to imply here that black racial attitudes are primarily influenced by the community external to the school, that is no less true for whites. The difference is probably that even when teachers are black, black children see school as part of a white world. a world where blacks have little influence. Accordingly, teachers, whatever their race, cannot be reference figures for black children as easily as for white ones.

This speculation squares with another finding of the Forehand et al. study: that black students' racial attitudes were affected by school "efficacy," or fairness. Gordon, too, emphasized examination of equitable school practices, not only for their practical effects, but for their impact on black students' perceptions of the school. The general effect of a perception of fairness is probably to redefine the school as a more integral part of a black child's own world. If it is a place where teachers and administrators of his or her own race have equal status and power, where he or she receives equitable treatment, and where he or she does not have to overcome obstacles absent for white children, some feeling of ownership and belonging may begin to develop. In that framework, school staff may be redefined as legitimate reference figures.

IV. Educational Programs

Gordon's criteria for effective integration included the presence of certain educational programs: compensatory efforts to equalize educational opportunity, and curriculum and materials reflective of cultural diversity. Forehand et al. stressed the importance of the latter. Their report found that the inclusion of black history classes and openness of class discussions on race were associated with successful integration.

If such programs have an intrinsic effect on attitudes—that is, an effect over and above their impact as symbols of administrative and faculty support of integration—it is probably through their effects on beliefs and on feelings about the other race. While black students' pride may be increased by exposure to black history materials, whites may discover a new sense of empathy with, or respect for, the black experience. At the least, their conceptions of the black role in history, and by extension, beliefs about black capabilities, may be altered.

In a very general sense, the effects of such educational programs may be roughly similar to the effects of educational and public relations programs about desegregation on community attitudes. Gordon stressed the importance of communication with the public in Ewing and Orangeburg, particularly. Again, if such programs are effective beyond their impact as displays of administrative support for desegregation, it is probably because the information conveyed alters beliefs about the probable impact of the change. This, of course, is not as direct as school programs that seek to alter beliefs about racial characteristics; the effect is to counteract the impact of negative attitudes, rather than to alter them.

V. Contact

Schools affect integration through specific practices as well as through programs. Practices that affect contacts between black and white students may be among the most important. The Gordon report noted that in Goldsboro and Orangeburg interracial student interaction during school failed to extend to the after-school hours at least partly for reasons of logistics: busing operated as a preventive. Some students couldn't remain after school unless they lived in the neighborhood or were picked up. Other school practices had the opposite effect; they seemed to foster mixing. There was a suggestion in both studies that such positive, affirmative policy was necessary, that it provided a focus, an "excuse" for mingling in a situation where it wouldn't begin naturally. Thus, in Orangeburg, Gordon's team noted that while there was usually little after-school student interaction in the upper junior high grades, a local "Youth for Christ" movement had generated more. Forehand et al. reported that assignment of students to the same joint task was among the school practices associated with effective integration. They also found that projects requiring teamwork showed up as an important factor in a combined index of black and white student attitudes. This finding takes on importance in the light of the study's speculations about reasons for insignificant school effects on black students' racial attitudes. The authors point out that the study failed to estimate the impact of white student attitudes on black attitudes, although these may have been far more important than white teachers' attitudes. If black attitudes, as reflected in the combined index, were affected by interracial school projects, this suggests that student contacts do in fact affect black attitudes.

Contact—experience of the other race—may be the most effective force of all. The impact of projects requiring inter-

racial association on the attitudes of both black and white students was highlighted in the Forehand et al. report. With the students in the upper grades, time was also a significant factor —with greater length of time integrated correlating with more positive attitudes on the part of the white students. The Gordon study noted that in some schools, student interaction even within the school decreased in the higher grades. Some parents thought the lack of mingling had to do with peer pressure, but if a child's peers learn to accept another race as young children, negative peer pressure will diminish.

The first four major forces discussed in this article affect mainly our notions about acceptable behavior. Courses about black history and open discussions about race may begin to affect beliefs as well. But the strongest impact on beliefs, and on feelings too, may come from experience.

In some of the sites studied by Gordon's research team, the experience of desegregation contradicted the expectations of community members, teachers, and students. White teachers found that it was, after all, possible to drive through certain sections of town without mishap. White parents found that their children's grades did not plummet.

Of course, positive experiences may not necessarily occur automatically. If there are real differences in student achievement, compensatory programs will be necessary. As Gordon's team found in Orangeburg, educational innovations designed to serve all students more effectively can promote acceptance of desegregation. Furthermore, in places like Birmingham, where there is considerable hostility between white and black students, fights will occur unless positive steps are taken to defuse the situation from the outset. Where peaceful desegregation is adequately fostered, and where students have the opportunity to experience each other's company in positive contexts, the effect noted in the Forehand et al. study have a chance to operate.

Beliefs and feelings about racial differences and about the impact of integration on individual self-interest are probably at the heart of attitudes about appropriate behavior toward the other race, and therefore at the heart of resistance to change. Significantly, Pettigrew found that white voters in northern cities who supported segregationists and opposed black candidates, had a greater sense of relative deprivation than their fellow citizens. Sometimes the gains of black people were a direct threat to a low sense of social status. Sometimes black economic gains threatened an already shaky sense of economic status in relation to workers in other occupational categories.

Contact, then, is not necessarily a cure for all attitudes that impede integration. If the problem is economic or social insecurity, what little "security" one has rests on the weak foundation of feeling "better" than some group even lower in the social pecking order. The solution to this syndrome lies outside the sphere of race per se; people with such a deep sense of social inequity would probably find ethnic or religious scapegoats if racial ones were not handy. It is not surprising then that Pettigrew reported the earliest compliance with desegregation in counties that had few blacks as well as conditions of rapid growth. There was, in short, enough opportunity for everyone.

The effect of contact, or direct experience with the other race, is limited in another way, too. If the adult society outside the school frowns on interracial contact, children will be inclined to avoid its sanctions. They will confine their new behavior to the school.

Perspective

Desegregation demands less than integration. At its most basic, it requires only that a few administrative decision-makers agree to draft an acceptable desegregation plan. Then the community must agree not to oppose the plan. As this brief analysis has argued, none of this depends on fundamental attitude change about race. Neither white administrative decision-makers nor white community members need to alter their ideas about acceptable behavior toward blacks, much less their beliefs or feelings about blacks. It is sufficient that their distaste for violence and/or respect for law be tapped, and that they comply despite unaltered racism.

Integration, by contrast, must ultimately come from the mind and the heart. Law, administrative policy, and teacher directives can take the process only so far. As in the case of desegregation, instructions from above may have a protective function. In a society that punishes mixing, it may enable an individual to disclaim responsibility for his or her actions. Thus, not only superintendents and principals, but school children, may be able to say, if challenged, "I didn't want to, but I had to. I don't really believe in that sort of thing." Obviously, for integration, unlike desegregation, that is not enough. Ultimately, people must be able not only to believe in interracial contact and equity, but to admit that they do. Otherwise, beliefs will remain private and unexpressed in outward behavior except by a courageous few. The reports reviewed suggest that while the cure for racism is not entirely in the hands of schools, schools will ignore community attitudes at their peril. A combined approach is called for: starting young, and providing supports for attitude change through curriculum, equitable school practice, enforced standards for teacher behavior, and cultivation of community support.

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